A Miracle of St. Cuthbert and Sonnets

R. E. LEE GIBSON

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JUN 1 1903

A MIRACLE

OF

ST. CUTHBERT

AND

SONNETS

BY

R. E. LEE GIBSON

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY
JOHN P. MORTON & COMPANY
INCORPORATED
1909

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TO THE MEMORY OF

MY WIFE

OF what avail to me is this fair clime,
The tender azure of these brooding skies,
Since now in earth the heart that loved me lies,
Smitten with death as some pale flower with rime?
What profits it that here in moods sublime,
Nature unfolds new grandeur to my eyes?
Yet though these scenes I now no more may prize,
It comforts me—O perished ere thy prime—
That majesty thus guards thee; thee in whom
Life has exchanged, through Death's mysterious power,
For immortality thy mortal clay;
O dear heart mouldering in the grave's cold gloom,
Blue mountains round thee rise, and o'er them tower
The snow-capped, dim volcanoes, far away.

CITY OF MEXICO, 1907

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A MIRACLE OF ST. CUTHBERT

A MIRACLE OF ST. CUTHBERT

DEDICATED TO MY FRIEND, DR. WARREN G. PRIEST.

This poem was occasioned by the inspection of an ancient MS. in the British Museum, London. The MS. describes the wanderings of the monks of Lindisfarne with the body of St. Cuthbert during an invasion by the Danes, A. D. 875, and the loss and recovery of a valuable copy of the Gospels, written in honor of St. Cuthbert. The monks endeavored to cross over into Ireland, carrying the saint's body and the book with them, but were driven back by a storm. In this storm the copy of the Gospels, adorned with gold and precious stones, fell overboard (the vessel having capsized) and sank into the depths of the sea. Some time afterward the sacred MS. was washed ashore and found when the tide was low, on the beach, "exhibiting all its outer splendor of jewels and gold, and all the beauty of its pages and writing within, as though it had never been touched by water. And this is believed to have been due to the merits of St. Cuthbert himself; and the book is preserved to this day, and as before stated, no sign of damage by water is visible in it."

I

Of an old friar and his all-beauteous book
One of our poets in a lay hath told;
Picturing the monk, as with ecstatic look,
By a dim taper, in his cell of old,
He wrote God's Word in crimson and in gold.
Whiles, 'twixt the text, with unremitting care,
He traced initials, delicately bold,
And seraphs' heads, and saints with silver hair.
A monument to his prodigious skill
The volume yet remains, a work of wonder still.

II

Thus the Epistles, all in gold, were done,
And the Apocalypse in red and blue;
Surely Christ's ransom for his soul was won,
Who for the Lord so sweet a task could do;
Clothing the Word in loveliness anew;
Feasting the eye while nourishing the soul;
Humbly he wrought who did such toil pursue,
But grav'd his name on Fame's eternal scroll.
At Cuthbert's bier, when that great saint was dead,
The Gospels, thus adorned, lay open at his head.

III

It was a tome all precious to the sight
With colored capitals of rare designs,
By Eadfrid painted, the skill'd anchorite;
The text embower'd in a mass of vines;
Lilies and roses nestled 'mid the lines;
A songbird here seemed warbling hymns of praise;
There a bright star, the fairest orb that shines,
The Star of Bethlehem, shot down its rays;
And on each leaf, with meek and lowly look,
A pale, sweet face of Christ lent pathos to the book.

IV

The work, a model of the goldsmith's art,
With precious stones was thickly studded o'er,
Bound and embellish'd by some grateful heart,
In honor of the good saint now no more.
No pains were spared, nor was there dearth of store,
To make it worthy of the honored dead.
Bilfrid, the bishop, with his own hand bore
The book, and laid it at St. Cuthbert's head.
In the soft light that o'er the bier did stream,
The jewels on the book like twinkling stars did gleam.

V

Dear in God's sight, as David doth record,
Is a saint's death,—a holy life's calm close;
Enoch ascended, living, to the Lord,
Triumphant o'er Death's sting, and the world's woes;
Elijah, too, attained Heaven's pure repose,
Borne thither in a chariot of flame.
Not in the pomp in which it came to those,
The final summons to St. Cuthbert came.
Death like a shadow o'er his pathway crept;
The Saint, among the Just, on Abraham's bosom slept.

VI

Albion had claimed the ashes of her dead,
And for her loss her gentle tears did flow;
Oft for her faults his tender heart had bled,
And for her merits oft his breast did glow;
His blessings on her did he oft bestow;
His prayers for her ascended night and day;
Now that Death's dart had laid the sweet Saint low,
What soil but hers might claim his hallowed clay?
In an old church wrapped 'round with peaceful shade,
Until the Judgment Morn, let him at rest be laid.

VII

In Durham church, within a cloister's gloom,
In a sweet spot, apart from noise and din,
They were resolved to build a sculptured tomb,
Laying the book thereon, the bones within;
Making a shrine where, kneeling, they might win
The special favor of the Saint by prayer;
Might gain deliverance from the toils of sin,
Wherewith the Arch-fiend doth our souls ensnare.
When pious lives thus reach their earthly close,
'Tis meet in some old church their relics should repose.

VIII

No tongue the beauty of that fane could tell;
On a great hill the minster towered high,
With lofty dome, and soaring pinnacle,
And taper spire that seemed to prop the sky;
A church to charm the pilgrim, passing by;
Of rock and wood the House of God was made;
Had many an archway pleasing to the eye,
And long, dim aisle and dusky colonnade.
Oft for the dead had Cuthbert there sung mass;
Death now had mowed him down; for lo, all flesh is grass.

IX

There had he preached Christ's Kingdom with great power,
And many converts to the Faith had won;
There had crowds thronged to hear him, hour by hour,
From there his fame throughout the world had run;
He was of Christendom the morning sun,
Whose broadening beams the Church's way illumed;
Now that at last his bright career was done,
It seemed that Night her ancient sway resumed.
This verse, a flower of pure, poetic speech,
Is from a sermon culled, which there he once did preach:

X

"Satan (he said) hath sprynges, notte a fewe,
Snares to entoyl us, and oure peace destroy;
Redd wyne was ever hys most temptyng brewe,
And womankynd hys most approved decoy;
Ye who would cleave to ynnocence and joy,
Reck ye the rede, theyre blandyshments eschewe;
With purer pastymes the fleet hours employ,
And pleasure's lyght by safer paths pursue.
Sylver and goulde are roots of grievous ill,
Botte wyne and woman's wyles are perils deadlier still."

XI

Britain at that time by a barbarous host
Gravely was threaten'd; for, with sword and brand,
The Danes were thundering at her chalky coast,
Swarming in legions to invade the land;
'Twas then that faithful, heaven-directed band,
The monks of Lindisfarne, made haste and came,
And took the corpse and holy book in hand,
And to the seashore safely brought the same.
A boat lay moored beside the beach meanwhile,
Waiting to waft them thence to Erin's sheltering isle.

XII

The monks had placed the corpse and book on board,
And put to sea; and all seemed going well;
When suddenly a tempest burst and roar'd,
And the deep yawned as yawns the mouth of Hell;
And fear and trembling on the oarsmen fell,
As the mad elements did rush and rave;
And some by prayer, and some by charm and spell,
Sought to subdue the wildly rolling wave.
But prayer and magic were alike in vain;
Beneath the foaming flood, the boat went down amain.

XIII

How did it chance? What answer may be made?
The sea grew still; God's hand was stretched to save;
A passing sail bore down with timely aid,
And no man found that day a watery grave.
The Saint ('twas said) upon the surging wave,
Walk'd as Christ walk'd on stormy Galilee,
And succor to the floundering oarsmen gave,
And pluck'd them forth from the devouring sea.
But of the Book? Again what tongue shall say?
A thousand fathoms deep the precious volume lay.

XIV

Yet safe the corpse lay on the stranger ship,
Unchanged, save that the book was there no more,
And wondering awe kept silent every lip,
And no man spake of what had gone before.
Long afterwards upon the bleak seashore
The book was found without a scar or stain;
No trace of its deep ocean bath it bore,
Though long beneath the billows it had lain.
No mark of wave or wind or salt or sand;
'Twas fresh as when, new-made, it came from Eadfrid's hand.

XV

"Here was a miracle, as grand as those
The Prophets wrought of old in Palestine."
A mystery that, rightly pondered, shows
The immortality of Truth divine.
Not since our Lord changed water into wine,
At Cana, was God's power evinced more sure;
'Twas Heaven itself that gave an added sign
That evermore the Gospel should endure.
Truth shall not pass, whatever else may fail,
Nor shall the gates of Hell against God's Word prevail.

XVI

Some say the jewels gave the Saint offense
(Seeing that poverty he most had loved),
And that their loss was proof and evidence
To make vain show it illy men behoved;
And having thus their lavishness reproved,
He did again the jeweled tome restore,
That from the lids the gems might be removed,
Sold, and the price bestowed upon the poor.
At Cuthbert's tomb the poor aye succor find;
Many are healed thereat,—the maim'd, the halt, the blind.

THE LEGEND OF THE RED ROSE

THE LEGEND OF THE RED ROSE

I

It chanced long since upon a Christmastide,
At an old inn, before a blazing hearth,
A Jew and Christian who did there abide
Fell to disputing o'er our Savior's birth.
Touching the advent of God's Son on earth,
Steeped in his tribal prejudice, the Jew
Scoffed at our doctrine and decried its worth,
Spurning the Gospel story as untrue.
Then, on a sudden, in their midst did stand
The Virgin Mary's self, a flower-pot in her hand.

II

The gracious presence of the heavenly guest
Brightened the room, albeit they knew her not;
She with one hand the Sainted Babe caressed,
And in the other grasped the flower pot;
Herself the rose of womankind, God wot,
She turned upon them a pure, pensive face,
Wondering, as when first conscious of her lot,
She heard God's angel hail her full of grace.
Forth from the jar which she held out to them
Protruded dead and dry a rose's broken stem.

III

Then spake the Christian: "Truly we believe
That as the plant which yonder dame doth bear,
Doubtless did once upon its stalk conceive,
And, without craft, bring forth a flower fair,—
So did the Virgin, pure beyond compare,
Sinless as Eve before her primal fall,
Inviolate conceive Heaven's son and heir,
Our Lord and King, the Savior of us all.
Even in this wise was our Redeemer born."
The Jew liked not the thought, and laughed the words to scorn.

IV

"Ere I believe," he said, "so false a thing,
Or hear with patience so absurd a tale,
First let a rose from yonder dead stalk spring,
And to our sense its sweetness here exhale."
Even as he spake the sullen wintry gale
Moaned in the chimney, muttered in the flue;
Our Lady touched the stem with fingers pale,
And lo, a red rose crimsoned into view.
Richly the blossom did its fragrance yield,
And where the dead stalk hung, the full flower stood revealed.

V

"Mother of Christ," the Jew, converted, cried,
"Now will I own thee, and thy lesson heed;
God's spouse thou art, and Heaven's immaculate bride;
And the pure gem that from thee did proceed,
Is the fair flower of Jesse's rod indeed.
The chaste conception by the seers foretold;
Ay, the Good Shepherd, hither sent to lead
The wandering flocks of Israel to the fold."
The vision vanished, leaving them in gloom,
But a most holy calm pervaded all the room.

SONNETS

SONNETS

I

THE UNREALITY OF DEATH.

There is no death. (Oh, let us so contend.)
Death, let us claim, is but a going hence;
In the clear wisdom of God's providence,
Merely a means to some appointed end.
Dread ordinance that none may comprehend,
Strange and forbidding to our normal sense,
It is an edict of Omnipotence,
God's will, to which all finite wills must bend.
What is this change; this stopping of our breath;
This rendering back to earth of our hushed hearts;
This breaking here of life's mysterious tie?
Our Lord sends forth from Heaven the raven, Death,
With food to nourish our immortal parts
For life beyond. We therefore never die.

II

"THAT UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY."

No sage has told us what it is to die,
Nor solved Death's strange enigma. Creeds are vain;
We know not whither lies that dim domain,
That shadowy kingdom veiled from mortal eye.
Into the grave's deep secret who can pry?
Martha's and Mary's brother, that had lain
Those four days dead, whom Christ raised up again,
If asked "Where wert thou?" ventured no reply.
None may that riddle read us; hence we fare,
Toward that pale region with a sense of dread,
Trembling at Death as at some fearful ill;
Whereas a gentler aspect he may wear,
And we may find at last, when we are dead,
Our shades here round the old haunts lingering still.

III

OLD MEXICO.

"Old Mexico," the words are soft and bland:
My breast with tender longings they inspire,
Recalling scenes that warm again, like fire,
My soul within; my soul that like a brand
Kindles with love for that devoted land.
Home of Romance and of the Heart's Desire;
Where languid Summer, robed in rich attire,
Trips, the round year, her dreamy saraband.
Moss-mantled ruins; all that now remains,
The sole, sad vestige of a race gone by;
Majestic mountains and wide-stretching plains,
And blue expanses of the tropic sky;
And nut-brown girls with sunshine in their veins;
Ah me, the land for which once more I sigh!

IV

MEXICANA.

Long reaches of the level, burning plain;
And in the distance, dim against the sky,
A range of shadowy mountains; parched and dry,
One mighty desert seems the vast domain.
Then pulque-blades to greater growth attain,
And soon the soil discloses to the eye
Strange plants that here the torrid drouth defy,
And bloom despite the paucity of rain.
The sage-brush and the cactus; shrubs like these,
At every turn, confront us as we go,
To where at last Puebla basks at ease,
Among her palm groves, under peaks of snow,
And, grouped around her, fair Oaxaca sees
The lavish growths of Southern Mexico.

V

OAXACA.

These hills, they say, are veined with precious ores;
Silver and gold their granite hearts contain,
Whereof, each year, the toil-worn miners drain,
Out of the rocks, immeasurable stores.
Exhaustless Ophirs, to these alien shores
They lured, of old, those dauntless sons of Spain,
Whose mighty galleons plowed the Spanish Main,
Fraught with the wealth which here the earth outpours.
Hills of Oaxaca, from your aureate mould,
Pure hearts have sprung here, like your native gold;
Hearts that loved Freedom, and divined her day:
Intrepid Diaz, valorous and true,
Like Juarez, here the breath of life first drew;
Immortal names that shall not pass away.

VI

THE AWAKENING.

Fair land beyond the Rio Grande's flood,
Come forth with us into the broadening day.
Let nothing daunt thee, nor thy steps delay;
Thou too, hast shed for Liberty thy blood;
Thou too, like us, didst crush a bat-like brood
Of ancient ills, that in thy house held sway;
One aim is ours; both tread the selfsame way;
Of neighboring soil, and of one sisterhood.
Rise up, brave land, and in the pride of youth
Press on with us; bold, puissant, awake,
Thou turnest from the old paths fraught with ruth,
And from thy limbs the coils of sloth dost shake,
Proving anew thy emblem's blazoned truth,
The Eagle holding in its beak the Snake.

VII

MITLA.

These are the walls of Mitla; rent and gray,
Behold, she stands here 'mid these lonesome hills.
The curious heart with fascination thrills
Here at the ravages of mute decay.
Tempests have made her monoliths their prey;
Rank weeds have choked her portals; rubbish fills
Her corridors; and, crowning all these ills,
Her pillars fall; her great stones drop away.
The strangest sight in this strange land to see,
Silent she stands here with her crumbling walls,
Mantled in gloom and veiled in mystery;
The haunt of desolation; in her halls
Dimly the spirit of antiquity
Broods, and the shadow of the far Past falls.

VIII

POPOCATEPETL.

Look, how she rises 'mid her giant train,
Her sovran peak uplifting; crowned with snow,
And veiled in clouds; and mark you, how below
Spreads, clothed with verdure, the surrounding plain.
Winter has made her summit his domain,
While at her foot dwells Summer; naught doth show
What Vulcan fires within her breast still glow,
What Titan forces in her heart yet reign.
Patient as Pelee, she awaits the day,
Far off, but fraught with tragedy and death,
Against whose dawn colossal ruin is planned,
When she may rise and shake her bonds away,
And, spreading havoc with her fiery breath,
Lay waste the tropic beauty of the land.

IX

THE TREE OF TULA.

How long to Heaven thy bold, defiant head
Hast thou thus lifted, thou Titanic Tree;
Standing aloof in calm security,
While Time stalks onward with remorseless tread?
Thou too shalt lie forgotten with the dead,
A prey to Change; all things must cease to be;
Thou too shalt bow one day to Fate's decree,
And fall to earth, thy strength and glory fled.
Yet thou wast towering in thy sovereign pride,
And all the winds to thee their homage paid,
While great things chanced, that now seem long ago;
Thou stood'st here, haply, when proud Cortez died;
When our sweet Chaucer in his tomb was laid;
When Death's hand struck the conquering Cæsar low.

X

THE GRAVE OF SANTA ANNA.

We climbed the steep hill to the summit's crest,
Up steps of stone; and in the churchyard gloom,
A shaded spot, we found the patriot's tomb.
O'ermastering awe our spirits there possessed,
And on our minds this solemn thought impressed;
Here sleeps, a prey now to man's common doom,
One for whose fame once all the world made room.
How false is Glory, and how vain its quest.
The violent passions of the past were dead,
Stilled even our memories of the Alamo;
Our hearts grew soft there by his lowly bed,
Where roses twine and sweet airs gently blow,
Whose sword with slaughter of our sires was red,
Our country's once uncompromising foe.

XI

"EL ARBOL DE LA NOCHE TRISTE."

Old am I now and blasted, trunk and limb;
Yet I recall how once upon a time,
Long centuries since, when I was in my prime,
The Conqueror chanced here, and I sheltered him.
That memory, which time nor change can dim,
Makes, from my aged roots, the cold sap climb,
For round his soul then, like a peak sublime,
Cloud-wrapped, the shadows of defeat hung grim.
The day had roared with battle; from the town
Cuauhtemoc had put his foes to flight,
And crushed and scattered were the cavaliers;
And here, despairing, at my foot sat down
The vanquished Cortez; and his face that night,
Haggard and worn, was bathed in hopeless tears.

XII

THE SACRIFICIAL STONE.

The wasting years have marred it not at all;
Rude-sculptured o'er with strange, barbaric art,
It still endures, a curious thing apart,
Here 'midst the idols ranged around the wall.
Stern relic of the Aztecs' temple hall,
At sight of it, dark fancies chill the heart
Of days when Faith had neither guide nor chart,
And Superstition held the age in thrall.
Since then what changes has this country known!
There where the grim priest, in those days of yore,
The quivering vitals from his victim tore,
With heathen rites above this selfsame stone,
To-day, uplifted on yon lofty fane,
The Cross stands, telling of Christ's gentle reign.

XIII

THE NEW ADVENTURERS.

Not like those Spanish Conquerors of old,
Who, glorying in the turmoil that they made,
Fought their way here with fagot and with blade,
Bartering their better selves for Aztec gold,
The new adventurers, with aims as bold,
And hopes as strong, and hearts as unafraid,
Throng, in the wake of Commerce and of Trade,
Thither, Life's fairer prospects to behold.
Not to destroy, but to upbuild; they too
Come, and their fortunes with the State's are blent;
Plying their occupations here anew,
With industry and honorable intent,
Each, toiling at the work that he has planned,
Helps to develop and sustain the land.

XIV

SPRING IN MEXICO.

Spring's balmy breath is in the air once more;
The skies are blue and pensively serene;
The budding leaves put forth their wonted green;
And opening flowers their fragrant scents out-pour.
Nature casts off the sackcloth that she wore,
And robes herself in verdure; all the scene
Is mantled with the sunlight's limpid sheen,
Swarming with birds that build and sing and soar.
Fair in all lands Spring's genial charms appear,
But fairer here than elsewhere does she seem;
In threefold splendor she sits smiling here,
Working her miracles of bloom and beam;
While with a sense of quickening joy we view
How God with beauty clothes the Earth anew.

XV

AN ANCIENT HOUSE.

"The Casa Alvarado can boast of its ghosts."

The bones of Alvarado now are dust,
And haunted is the house wherein he dwelt;
There, like a presence, is the dim past felt,
Faint as a moonbeam in the window thrust.
The Conquerors' glory is a bygone gust,
A rose's scent that yesterday was smelt,
Though Fame still wears, as trophies at her belt,
Their deeds untarnished, while their good swords rust.
Their pale ghosts, haply, haunt those sad retreats,
And you may chance upon them unawares,
As softly there they glide from room to room;
May see them sitting on the old stone seats,
Or standing, haply, on the ancient stairs,
Clad as in mist, and fading in the gloom.

XVI

THE PORTRAITS OF THE VICEROYS.

Here, in the vesture of the old regime,
The lace and velvet of a bygone day,
High on the walls, in dignified array,
Their portraits hang thus, in the sunlight's gleam;
Half-faded, like the figments of a dream.
The viceroys of New Spain! Bold blades were they;
Pride of the realm once; of the throne the stay;
And of Old Chivalry the propping beam.
Here, as if fain to greet us with a nod,
Complacently, they gaze forth from the wall,
With frank, grave eyes, and lips that speak, though mute;
Quaint, pious-looking, antiquated, odd;
As if in life they were not, one and all,
Past masters in the time-worn art of loot.

XVII

THE CATHEDRAL AT NIGHT.

Now night upon the vast Cathedral lies,
And all that mighty pile is wrapped in shade;
Silence and gloom her ancient doors invade;
And shadowy her massive towers arise.
Thickly, o'erhead, the stars bestud the skies,
And the mild Eve in splendor is arrayed;
The lustre, which those heavenly lamps have made,
Mantling the old church in a silvery guise.
Standing aloof thus; solemnly apart;
In quiet meditation now she seems:
(Her symmetry the darkness hardly mars);
Her dim aisles crowded with the spoils of Art,
And rich with memories of the Past, she dreams,
Hallowed, and guarded by the gracious stars.

XVIII

TO THE GENIUS OF ANTIQUITY.

They say the shadow of the past is gone;
That a new era in the land upsprings;
That Progress, shaking from her restless wings
The darkness here, beholds at last the dawn.
Over the past, Oblivion's pall is drawn;
Old idols are forsaken; ancient things
Are prized no more; no reverence to them clings;
Mammon is lord, and men upon him fawn.
O thou, the spirit of dead ages, speak,
The genius of this land, ere thou shalt go,
Breathe us the secrets of the times antique,
Tell us the story of Old Mexico;
Read us the riddle, whose weird spell enthralls
Alban's lone mounds or Mitla's crumbling walls.

XIX

CORTEZ.

That ardent Spaniard, who, with eager eyes,
Lit by the dreams of conquest, saw unfurled
Spain's conquering banner in this Western world;
And, flushed with triumph, in a bold emprise,
Spread her dominion 'neath these sunset skies,
And from their throne the Montezumas hurled;
What man was he, his lip with fine scorn curled,
That men should rank him with Earth's great and wise?
While History lauds upon her deathless page
His lofty faith, indomitable mind,
And the strong will whereby he gained his goal,
He was a man, the product of his Age,
In whom the gods atrociously combined
An iron heart and mercenary soul.

XX

A LEAF FROM AN OLD CHRONICLE.

Borne in the van, the yellow flag of Spain
Blood-stain'd and tatter'd in the light wind blew;
By his proud mien distinguished 'mid the crew,
Cortez rode first, and after him his train.
Christ's liegemen thus they galloped o'er the plain;
Knights of the Faith; Crusaders, bold and true;
The hapless heathen in his tracks they slew;
Shatter'd his gods, and ravaged his domain.
With oath and ribald shout that rent the air,
They thus unfurled their standard to the breeze;
Likewise their hearts addressed themselves to prayer
And Cortez oft upon his bended knees,
Rich Aztec plunder panting to possess,
Moved Saints to save, and Heaven his cause to bless.

XXI

PONCE DE LEON AND HIS MEN.

Hither of old, Spain's banner in the van,
A hardy train, bold cavaliers, in sooth,
Came; and the Fountain of Perpetual Youth
Sought 'mid the trackless wilds Floridian.
For somewhere there, a native rumor ran,
The fountain gushed—and they would know the truth.
Their path was fraught with treachery and ruth,
And wretchedly they perished man by man.
Their bones were scattered in that alien soil;
Heroes they were and martyrs they became;
And all in vain was their adventurous toil;
No stream they found that could their youth reclaim;
But valor never was oblivion's spoil,
They chanced instead on wells of deathless fame.

XXII

ON THE BEACH AT SAN PEDRO.

Upon the beach where trampling breakers roar,
And spent surf sprawls along the shifting sand,
The tide at times flings forth on every hand
Seaweeds and shells upon the sloping shore.
Waifs of the wandering waves that evermore
The deep has rocked, they lie at last on land,
While round them ever to the ancient strand
The old Sea mutters her mysterious lore.
Thus we are borne, but whither? Day by day,
The tide of Time forever ebbs and flows,
The flood of years thus surges ceaselessly;
While still beyond and stretching far away,
Space of the Infinite that no man knows,
Lies the vast waste of the unfathomed sea.

XXIII

THE RULER.

He, who with firm hold at the helm doth stand,
Steering the Ship of State; who views with pride
How in the van of Nations she doth ride;
From whom the brave youth of this prosperous land
Gather their inspiration; in whose hand,
Safely the People's liberties abide;
Long may he yet, her counselor and guide,
Behold his Country's destinies expand.
The times require him still; the young State has
Need of his arm to shape yet her decrees.
(The world is poorer when great leaders pass,
And Nature makes such but by slow degrees);
Once this majestic land's Leonidas,
He has become now her Miltiades.

XXIV

"IT MAY BE WE SHALL TOUCH THE HAPPY ISLE."

It may be we shall touch the Happy Isle,
Where dreams come true; within whose charméd pale,
Peace broods; and Fortune is at hand to hail,
The wanderer's barque, and bless him with her smile.
It may be we shall touch it afterwhile,
That fairy shore where we would rest our sail;
But now storms burst, and adverse winds prevail,
And drive our vessels seaward, mile on mile.
Though, like Odysseus', our ships must ride
Far o'er the perilous seas of doubt and guile;
Though we must suffer pangs of wounded pride,
By false hope lured, and Pleasure's siren wile,
It may be that the tempest will subside,
And we shall touch at last the Happy Isle.

XXV

THE ROSE.

See, how she sits upon her leafy stem,
The Queen of Flowers; the Summer's pride; the Rose;
The fairest flower that in the garden grows,
With beauty crowned as with a diadem.
The moth flits 'round her like a wingéd gem;
The butterfly about her comes and goes;
Amid her tremulous leaves the soft air blows;
The dew hangs jewels on her robe's rich hem.
Proud as some sumptuous Orient queen she seems;
Sitting serene amid her gentle train,
She muses haply on her ancient clan;
And, gazing round her in the garden, dreams
On realms of old-time roses; Sharon's plain;
Iram's bright bowers, and vine-clad Gulistán.

XXVI

THE GENTLER VOICES.

Of all our laureled bards from Chaucer down,
To whom Fame lends a still attentive ear,
Shakespeare and Milton are esteemed most dear,
Noblest, and worthiest of the poet's crown.
Their mighty voices Time can never drown;
Yet two there are whose names I more revere:
Shelley and Keats, who claim a kindred tear,
"Inheritors of unfulfilled renown."
Those, like the thunder heard on Sinai's hill:
Like Cherith's hidden, murmuring brooklet, these.
Their songs the trump of Fame shall always fill,
Pregnant with beauty to inspire and please.
Is not the voice of some smooth-flowing rill
Charmful, as well as the majestic sea's?

XXVII

CONSTANCY.

So much uncertainty in all things lies,
We know not if the end we strive for most,
May be attained; and yet despite a host
Of doubts that darken, Hope still lights our eyes.
Life has no constant things, as have the skies,—
No steadfast stars; upon its storm-swept coast,
No strong Gibraltar such as Earth may boast;
Nothing that baffles change, nor time defies.
Yet though small sense of safety or of ease
Is granted for the hearts of men to know,
Though fears disturb us even as a breeze
Stirs in a bough and bends it to and fro,
May not our aims, like ships that sail the seas,
Drift on, and weather all the winds that blow?

XXVIII

THE TWO WINDS.

Said the North Wind: "From out my frozen lair,
With cold and famine on my blustering wings,
I issue forth, and all the welkin rings
With Winter, and the Earth lies bleak and bare."
The South Wind said: "From caverns of the air,
Round which the Sun his fieriest splendor flings,
I come; behold, my quiet pinion brings
Summer's deep peace, and Earth is green and fair."
The North Wind said: "Lo, Winter's hordes I guide,
Sleet, snow, and hail, when Heaven with Tempest lowers;
I drive them forth before me like vast herds.
Softly the sweet voice of the South replied:
"Summer I lead; lo, myriads of flowers
Flock in my train, and multitudes of birds."

XXIX

AUTUMN.

Sad though it was to see the Summer wane,
Its flowers withered, and its leaves grown sear;
Still, we rejoice that Autumn now is here,
With all the joys that follow in her train.
Sweet season of ripe fruit and golden grain,
Her quiet advent fills the land with cheer;
She comes to crown the promise of the year,
And ease the dread of Winter's barren reign.
Deep peace in her mild aspect is revealed,
And calm as Ruth she passes on her way,
A gentle goddess of the harvest-field,
Trusting the sickle to maintain her sway,—
Her sword and buckler, her good lance and shield,
Wherewith she holds the famine hordes at bay.

XXX

NIGHT.

Red-breasted Eve has perched against the west,
Low letting sink her ebon pinion—night;
Each floweret shuts its fragile blossom tight,
And with bowed head is zephyr-lulled to rest.
The sleepy bird flits twittering to its nest;
Athwart the gloom an owlet takes its flight;
The moon, a spectre, ghastly, grim and white,
Above the hilltops thrusts her sombre crest.
My heart turns sick; I lift it up and pray,
And all its ominous fancies routed are;
"Thou art, O Night, far lovelier than Day,"
I cry, as on my vision breaks a star,
Betok'ning this: Who turns to Heaven alway
Shall see, howe'er the darkness, light afar!

XXXI

DEEP IN THE FOREST.

Upon a time, beneath these forest boughs,
Perchance the wood-nymph sported; it may be
That faun and satyr, by this ancient tree,
Were wont of old to revel and carouse.
Or Dian here was haply wont to drowse
Under the shade; a dryad, blithe and free,
Once may have frolick'd, and with shouts of glee,
Twined here with garlands her effulgent brows.
This quiet wood; this space of shade and shine,
Haunted of bird and bee, where no god strays,—
Where solitude has built her secret shrine,—
Lures me to wander 'mid its leafy ways,
And hear the wind through rustling branch and vine,
Dirge the lost glory of those bygone days.

XXXII

COLONIAL.

The old house, many-gabled, far withdrawn
From the broad highway, and despoiled with age,
Torn by the summer's wrath, the winter's rage,
Still stands austere upon the spacious lawn.
In other days, the couriers here at dawn
Rode like the wind, by word or written page
Announcing tidings from Burgoyne or Gage,
Or with Cornwallis how the day had gone.
Time, like a Tory, loyal to the crown,
As loath to leave, seems fondly here to cling;
It were no marvel though a ghost strode down
Among the cedars, where the wild-birds sing,
In buckled shoon, cocked hat, and velvet gown,
Firm in the faith that George the Third is king.

XXXIII

MISTLETOE AND OAK.

The mistletoe about the mighty oak,
With fringe as delicate as fairy lace,
Scales the gnarled boughs, and wraps with easeful grace
The forest monarch in its leafy cloak.
Beauty and strength, combining thus, evoke
Our pleased surprise; here in this wildwood space,
Frailty and power in a fast embrace
Seem like an emblem of love's gentle yoke.
From lovers truly they learned thus to twine,
Sealing their compact in the sombre wood;
Haply did Vivian in this wise recline
On Merlin's bosom, in an amorous mood;
Or Marian nestle, like a graceful vine,
On the bold breast of sturdy Robin Hood.

XXXIV

FUNEREAL.

Rows of funereal emblems; banks of flowers;
And the dim tapers at the foot and head;
And underneath the fitful light they shed,
The sombre casket; and the long, dull hours,
Lagging, while night amid their shadows cowers;—
Such is the vigil by the shrouded dead,
The solemn watch that with a sense of dread
And deep despondency the soul o'erpowers.
But soon the dawn will redden; and the gloom
Lessen a little; and the great sun smite
The darkness from him; and the day will bloom
In its accustomed splendor; and the night
Fade; and a sweet voice in the hallowed room
Lift the consoling hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light."

XXXV

THE PIONEER.

Inured to hardship,—putting fear aside,—
His purpose dared, while yet our coasts were new,
To press beyond the confines, and to hew
The path of empire through a waste untried.
The mountain echoes to his voice replied;
The lordly rivers sped his birch canoe;
And, in the forest, like a dream come true,
Around his cabin stretched his cornfield wide.
Though the red savage oft assailed him sore,
In deadly feud, with flintlock and with blade,
And wild beasts tracked him to his lonely door,
He scoffed at danger, steadfast, unafraid.
Such were the ills our sturdy fathers bore,
And such the stuff whereof their hearts were made.

XXXVI

LANDSCAPES.

The same bleak wilderness that, lo, these years
My feet have strayed in, Life still seems to be;
At every point the same sad scenes I see,
Which long have pained me, in this Vale of Tears;
Nothing is changed; save, as the twilight nears,
The ways grow dimmer; and each shrub and tree
Wears gloomier aspect; and there comes on me
A mightier burden of mysterious fears.
The wind's weird whisper; the complaining shrill
Of far-off blasts; the sighing of the breeze.
Who has not felt upon his heart a chill,
Deep in a forest, hearing sounds like these?
Yet, Life is but a woodland, vast and still,
And Death an owl that flutters 'mid its trees.

XXXVII

AT HAMPSTEAD, IN 1818.

(Keats, Shelley, and Leigh Hunt.)

Down that dim street that then was Hampstead Lane,
Like common men they went upon their way,
Three poet friends, who on a summer's day
Loved there to ramble over knoll and plain;
And hear perhaps the skylark's mellow strain,
The plover's note; or pluck perhaps a spray
Of humble bloom, whereon the dew still lay;
Pure, simple joys, for which their hearts were fain.
Yet were they destined for renown, these three,
Though one met death despairing of his bays,
And one died young, a victim of the sea,
And one toiled out the Psalmist's span of days.
Their songs are shrined within the hearts of men;
Time has made towers of their fame since then.

XXXVIII

BYRON.

He has not tasted death; his honored name
Lives in our hearts; and good men now rehearse
His deeds with praise (would that no man's were worse!);
And for his woes absolve him now from blame.
Greece boasts how once at Freedom's call he came,
With proffered aid, alike of sword and purse,
While by the beauty of his noble verse
He crowned himself with never-dying fame.
Yet, in the flesh, self-exiled from the throng,
Touching, of various quills, the tender stops,
And warbling, as he went, his heartfelt rhyme,
He droop'd, and on the Alpine heights of Song,
"The difficult air of the iced mountain tops"
Untimely breathed, and perished ere his prime.

XXXIX

SHAKESPEARE'S STATUE IN TOWER GROVE PARK, ST. LOUIS.

"He was not of an age, but for all time."

Lord of vast manors in the realms of rhyme,
And prince of bards, whose statue here is seen,
In bronze preserving that majestic mien
And air, which made thee in the flesh sublime;
Poet, whose fame in every age and clime
Shall live: whose bays shall evermore be green:
Death had no signet for those brows serene,
Nor wast thou of an age, but for all time.
Here through each heart a sense of pride must thrill
To know thy work, with sagest counsel fraught,
And wisdom, has not vanished from our ken;
But still is prized as when thy facile quill
First, like a wingéd herald of thy Thought,
Made known thy Mind's supremacy to men.

XL

TO ALDRICH.

Greatly they err who say the Muse has fled,
And that on earth the Age of Gold is o'er;
That those pure flames which quenchless rose of yore
Once on her altars now are cold and dead.
Apollo, with the wreath upon his head
And in his hand the lyre which first he bore,
Claims homage still; his temples evermore
Are guarded, and his altar-fires are fed.
Song has her worship, even in these days,
And humbly down before her shrine we bow
(Some hearts there are the sparks of faith retain).
Dear Poet, to her service bound, thy lays
Are hymns which in her honor rise, and thou
Her high-priest art, and teachest in her fane.

XLI

DECADENCE OF POETRY.

The fountain of Old Song is gushing still;
Though Pan no more his reed-pipe there may blow,
By the charm'd waves, the poets come and go,
Like gods that visited the Pierian rill.
Not the spring's magic, but our times are ill;
And Poesy, to-day, must droop with woe,
Seeing the dove mistaken for the crow,
Hearing the lark in vain its music spill.
For we have builded lately curious shrines;
Hung on an Oracle's disputed word;
Beheld a great light, where no great light shines;
And deemed divine what Nature made absurd;
We've turned away from Keats' and Milton's lyre,
To track the goat-god Whitman through a mire.

XLII

OUR UTILITARIAN AGE.

The old Divinities are flown from earth,
And sad days are upon us; in her prime,
The Muse has sought a more congenial clime,
And Song is driven, like a Titan, forth.
Of laborers the vineyard shows no dearth,
But in the strenuous strife that marks our time,
No soul is stirred, as with a strain sublime,
By word or action to exploit its worth.
Toilers there are, and legion is their name,
For traffic now the world with clamor fills,
Drowning the voice inspired. Many there be
That drive the whirling wheels on land and sea,
But craftsmen merely; few that keep aflame
Art's sacred fires upon their native hills.

XLIII

TO MADISON CAWEIN.

Poet, your hand has pluck'd the fairest flowers
In all Castalia; from the clearest rill
Of Helicon, your soul has drunk its fill.
Your eyes have seen Parnassus; there are hours
Wherein you've wandered 'mid the brightest bowers
Of Arcady; subservient to your will,
Dreams throng about you, and sweet thoughts, that thrill
The Heart, are 'wakened by your magic powers.
The beauty of your verses even now
With ecstasy my happy heart has swayed,
And left me wondering if beneath a bough,
In some deep forest where perchance you strayed,
You had met Pan,—old Pan, who taught you how
The golden music of his flute was made.

XLIV

SEVERN AT KEATS' GRAVE.

Duty could prompt no more, nor love suggest
Aught for his comfort we had left undone,
Who watched the sinking of his life's young sun,
And felt the presence of his night of rest.
And though our tears our poignant grief expressed,
We nursed the knowledge of a triumph won,
That somewhere, though his earthly race was run,
His soul sped onward in life's happier quest.
Broken in spirit and constrained to roam,
Searching for life, the youthful poet came,
And in the haven of a Roman home
Yielded his breath; forevermore his name,
Written in water, like the wave-flung foam,
Shall ride the billows of enduring fame.

XLV

THE DEATH OF ROBIN HOOD.

Quoth Robin Hood to Little John, "Good friend,
Night comes apace; the darkness gathers fast;
And this same hour, methinks, will be my last,
For, like the day, my life draws near its end.
Yon sun whose beams with deepening shades contend,
Faint on the hills his parting look hath cast,
So stray my thoughts now o'er the cherished past,
As I, like him, into my grave descend.
While thus the gloom enfolds us as a pall,
One last boon I would ask thee, ere I die;
An thou wilt grant it, reach me from the wall
My bow and shaft: one last shot let me try:
And wheresoe'er the feathered barb may fall,
Dig thou my grave, for there I fain would lie."

XLVI

THE VINEYARD.

Our Master hired us with the wage of life
To labor in His vineyard; day by day,
These many seasons we have earned our pay,
And toiling, flagged not in the cheerless strife.
The air around us evermore is rife
With sighs of pain, and murmurings of dismay,
And some among us thence are torn away,
As vines are sundered by the pruner's knife.
Where art Thou, Lord? We have not seen Thy face,
Nor heard Thy voice in all the vineyard round.
The lord and master of this busy place,
The august husbandman, is nowhere found;
Yet will He teach us at the last day's close,
The purpose of our toil here, and our woes.

XLVII

JOB.

That man of Uz whom Thou didst scourge of old,
Didst strip of his possessions, and bereave
Of sons and daughters, that he might receive
The lash of pain in measure manifold;
Was he not, Lord, a man of righteous mold,
Of earnest heart, courageous to achieve
Grace in Thy sight, and to Thy love to cleave,
Suiting Thy words, "My servant Job, behold,
An upright, just and perfect man is he"?
Surely those ills were rained upon his head,
And all those sorrows he was made to see,
That others stricken might be comforted;
That others, chastened, might endure the rod,
With like submission to the will of God.

XLVIII

ON A TEXT FROM JOB.

Touching the Lord, who can His might deny?
He builded the vast mountains where they stand;
The sea's wide waste, and weltering caves He planned,
And fashioned the arch'd fabric of the sky.
He set the sun upon its throne on high,
And shaped Arcturus with His august hand;
The countless orbs that move at His command,
Through boundless space, His power exemplify.
Not these alone, but all things prove God's might;
Man He hath made, and every living thing:
(Into our mouths the breath of life He blew);
He formed the winds, and hath ordained their flight;
Caused the sweet flowers from the Earth to spring;
And sends from Heaven the bounty of the dew.

XLIX

TO GOV. CHARLES P. JOHNSON.

Now having come to that serene, ripe age,
Touching the Psalmist's threescore years and ten,
After much toil among thy fellow men,
And entering, as we trust, life's calmer stage,
Much is there left to cheer thee, and assuage
Thy labors yet; to call forth now and then
Those talents that, employed with tongue or pen,
May still the world's attention oft engage.
Thou hast not sought mere riches to possess;
Thy forte lay in the forum, not the mart;
Wisely life's baser wants thou didst repress,
And all thy days didst choose the better part;
Honors thou hast, and competence no less,
And friends and children to console thy heart.

L

BAGDAD.

Oh, to have traversed, in Al Rashid's reign,
The streets of storied Bagdad; to have seen,
Blazing with jewels in the morning sheen,
The splendid pageant of the Caliph's train.
From far Balsora to have voyaged fain,
Sailing with Sinbad; to have dwelt serene,
After my travels, in a calm demesne,
Loaded with honors and with worldly gain.
For I am wearied of this irksome clime,
Where, spent with toil, we daily strive for bread;
It was not so in Bagdad's golden prime,
When good Haroun was Caliph; where, instead,
Favored of fortune, in a moment's time,
The world's vast treasures at one's feet were spread.

LI

TYRANNY.

Would it were happiness, and not sweet pain,
Which Love involves the Heart in; leaving out
The leaden links of agony and doubt,
Would that he bound us with a lighter chain.
Or, since in bondage we must needs remain,
Slaves to his will,—why should he forge about
The Heart a gyve too cumbersome and stout,
To lead so frail a captive in his train?
In silken meshes is the song-bird snared;
The minnow ambushed in a fragile seine;
The squirrel's cage is slenderly prepared,—
So light a thrall may timid things constrain,—
All save the Heart are mercifully spared;
Would that Love drew it by a gentler chain!

LII

AMBITION.

Ye who with hollow cheeks and faces pale,
And studious foreheads furrow'd o'er with care,
Forsake the low and level thoroughfare
To follow up ambition's mountain trail,
Be not o'er-quick to hurry; woes assail,
And unexpected danger and despair
Await the pilgrim as he ventures there,
Where few succeed and countless hundreds fail.
Be not o'er-fast to travel; bide your time;
For hard and toilsome is the steep to climb,
And oft misfortunes come, like birds of prey;
With monstrous wings extended, talons bent,
They seize our tender nestlings of content,
And scatter all their rosy plumes away!

LIII

LIFE.

Albeit mine eyes no goodly prospects cheer,
And Life, so far as I can understand,
Seems but a dismal waste of barren land,
Where no sweet harvests thrive, no flowers appear;
Yet in the desert must we sojourn here,
Building our pyramids upon the sand,
Tho' lone and limitless, on every hand,
The devastation stretches, bleak and drear.
So looks the Sphinx in Egypt, staid and stern,
While at her foot for many a rood away,
The sultry tracts of scorched Sahara lie;
Yet full and furious on her forehead burn,
Throughout the focal and the fervent day,
The splendid honors of the tropic sky!

LIV

FATE.

At Strophadean isles, amid Ionia's sea,
There dwelt two daughters of the Ocean God,
Fair-hair'd and wingéd, who in Hesiod
Are called Aello and Ocypete.
You may have heard what sorrow and hardship
They heap'd on blind Phineas, thick and fast;
And, ever as he sat at the repast,
They snatch'd the morsels from his starving lip.
Tho' they be mythical—there is a fate,
Which thus denies us fortune's fairest flowers;
And when we'd pluck them, doth anticipate
The fond design, and baffle it always;
Cropping the sweetest, we believed were ours,
With ruthless hand before our ravag'd gaze.

LV

DEATH.

Why need'st thou shudder with dejected air,
And blanch with craven pallor of affright,
To take thy final leave of life and light,
And for the silent pilgrimage prepare?
When Death upon thee, stealing unaware,
Comes as a thief comes, in the noiseless night,
Be thou but ready and 'twill all wax right,
'Tis but a respite from vexatious care!
Go, thou; and by the fagot-light of trust,
Seek thy repose, altho' thy couch be dust;
Tho' o'er thy head the charnel grasses sway;
The winding-sheet enfold thee, and thy form
Be served to supper the ignoble worm;
Sweet shalt thou slumber 'neath the spaded clay!

LVI

EVENING.

I turn full pagan at the day's decline,
And worship the down-dropping sun's sweet rays;
And in the deepening glow my spirit pays
Its warm devotion at the twilight's shrine.
Oh, but the dusk is wondrously divine;
Like berries gleaming out of darken'd boughs,
The bright stars globe on Heaven's skyey brows,
And night brims over with the moon's pale wine!
Then seem I like those Mussulmans of eld,
Who, casting o'er the skies their yearning gaze,
The waving palms of Paradise beheld,
With fruits bediamonding their verdurous sprays;
I bow to the still earth, and my heart, impell'd
By faith like theirs, pours also forth its praise!

LVII

THE CRUCIFIXION.

A spike into our dear Lord's side was thrust
When crucified, He groaned on Calvary,
(That you and I from sin might purchas'd be),
Spilling His precious blood upon the dust.
Then roll'd aghast the horror-stricken main,
And hoary mountains shook from peak to base;
Within a cloud the sham'd sun hid his face,
And lo! the temple's veil was rent in twain.
O strong resolve upon that cruel Tree,
To suffer and to perish thus for Man!
Stifling within Him His divinity,
Coeval with eternity's wide span,
He bow'd His blesséd head to God's decree,
And finished on the cross Redemption's plan.

LVIII

MANSIONS BEAUTIFUL.

How beautiful are Thy dwellings in the sky,
Whose shining portals stand for us asunder,
O Thou who sittest in the volley'd thunder,
And at whose feet the vivid lightnings fly!
Like one who once in Patmos did descry
Thy city, rapt with 'wilderment and wonder,
So may we, compass'd in the darkness under,
By faith, behold Thy palaces on high.
Scant is our vision, bound by earthly ties;
Wedded to flesh, our spirits scarce can see;
But oh! to one just mounted to the skies—
Some ransom'd soul that's newly been set free—
To its new-open'd and anointed eyes,
How beautiful those mansions, Lord, must be!

LIX

CONQUEST.

Now the shrill clarion of the katydid
Trills with a weird persistence, never done,
And day has groped with faltering steps amid
The failing honors of the sinking sun;
Shade upon shade, night's majesty is won
From wide, environing scopes of cloud-wreathed sky,
Whose wild and matchless splendors are begun,
Like fading embers, to dissolve and die.
Soon the red stars their spectral lamps will burn;
The sullen moon drift grimly on the view;
And darkness spread her raven pennons stern,
And night's rich conquest be achieved anew;
While evening empties from her sable urn
The dead day's ashes, in the dusk and dew.

LX

"BE NOT AFRAID."

The Angel at the Sepulchre, descried
By those who thither fared, was heard to speak
These blesséd words: "Be not afraid; ye seek
Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified";
So shall the souls that turn from sin aside,
Needy and heavy-laden ones and weak,
Sustained and solaced be by voices meek,
Which comfort those who make His cross their guide.
Such, at His feet, shall favor sure obtain,
Howe'er the wicked scoff, the godless rail;
Eternal peace shall in their bosoms reign,
And mercy's cup for them will never fail;
Great is their priceless, their immortal gain,
Who in their path the living Savior hail.

LXI

POE.

The envied beauty of his perfect art,
Who can define; who measure it, or weigh?
As unobtrusive as the rose's sway,
As patent as the perfume of her heart.
Like Phosphor or the Pleiades apart
His star climbs high; who can ignore its ray?
Critic, if malice thou must needs betray,
Choose a fit target for thy spiteful dart.
Wouldst thou contend that flowers and stars lack charm;
That the sea's voice is commonplace indeed;
That the wind's music in the boughs is poor?
Then wherefore seek his fair renown to harm?
Thou canst not rob him of his Art's high meed,
His bay-wreath crown, his fame that shall endure.

LXII

WRITTEN ON THE OCEAN.

One of thy gentler moods is this, O Sea;
Hardly the winds their wonted revels keep,
Though foam wreaths spangle the untroubled deep,
Fringing the waves that wander blithe and free.
The calm-browed morn in heaven-spun drapery,
In slumberous peace the sky and main doth steep;
Idly the clouds o'er yon soft azure creep,
And on this blue the froth drifts dreamily.
Not always thus thy visage have I seen,
Thou tranquil deep; thine is a changeful face;
Hoarse is thy voice, and savage is thy mien,
When billows rage, and gales blow fierce apace.
Fit emblem of the Heart, now free from strife,
Now lashed to fury by the storms of life.

LXIII

DOCTOR JOHNSON.

We know him best from Boswell's gentle page:
An uncouth man; of huge, ungainly frame,
But sweet in discourse, and unspoiled by fame;
Seer, moralist, philosopher and sage.
Warfare on evil did he ever wage;
Cared not for riches nor the world's acclaim:
Above all else he valued his good name;
Virtue alone his service did engage.
From all his peers he Jove-like stood apart,
Imperious, stern, and of heroic mold;
Scorning to fling the javelin or the dart,
He hurled his bolts like Jupiter, of old;
Rugged withal, but with a kindly heart,
As soft as swan's-down, and as pure as gold.

LXIV

AT KEATS' HOUSE, IN HAMPSTEAD.

Here are sweet-peas on tip-toe for a flight,
Close by the house wherein he once did dwell;
His very own, the flowers he loved so well,
That so inspired him of their charms to write.
There is the mulberry tree, where one tranced night
A nightingale with song her throat did swell,
Whose music, casting o'er his heart a spell,
Moved him to sing in strains of pure delight.
Here, in his day, he might have oft been seen,
Stepping perchance from yonder vine-wreath'd door
Or strolling haply on this shaded green,
Musing on old-time poets and their lore;
The gentle Keats, with mild majestic mien,
Methinks I see him, in the flesh, once more.

LXV

COMPOSED IN BROOKE STREET, HOLBORN.

In this same street, shut out from air and sun,
Thou once didst lodge,—ofttimes in abject need;
And 'mid these scenes, a miracle indeed,
Thy flower-like genius blossomed, Chatterton!
Even thus, at times, on hard-fought grounds is won,
Against o'erwhelming odds, the victor's meed;
Even thus, at times, mid foulest mire and weed,
The water-lily's milk-white cloth is spun.
Wherefore so rashly didst thou quit life's race,
With half thy mind's great powers still unrevealed?
When Chaucer's sceptre, Milton's iron mace,
Or Shakespeare's wand was thine to grasp and wield,
O gifted youth, who from this squalid place
Wast borne for burial to the potter's field!

LXVI

THE TOWER OF LONDON.

Proud blood, of old, within these walls was shed,
And noble hearts here ached. With quiet mien
And gentle words Bluff Harry's cast-off queen
Here on the block did seemly lay her head;
Here did the blood of Lady Jane stain red
The headsman's axe; and oh, most piteous scene,
Here, too—the victims of a despot's spleen—
The royal babes were murdered in their bed.
Horrors like these, grim Tower! thy gates recall;
Memories, from which the mind recoils aghast;
The harrowing thoughts that here the heart appall,
Rob of its charms the venerated Past.
Those Good, Old Days, less blest than we supposed,
Thank Heaven, are gone; those bloody chapters closed.

LXVII

RALEIGH'S CELL, IN THE TOWER.

Here the brave Raleigh his last battle waged;
This was his cell, the prison of the bird,
Which as Prince Henry, it is said, averred
No one but James, his father, could have caged.
The heart so oft in high emprise engaged,
Whose deeds such glory on his times conferred,
Whose name, moreover, is a household word,
With noble toil his anguish here assuaged.
Here the bold blade of Good Queen Bess's day,
The bard whom Spenser styled "the nightingale,"
"Shepherd of Ocean," "England's gem and flower,"
Passed, when the headsman claimed him for his prey,
With fearless steps, and looks that scorned to quail,
Forth to the scaffold from this gloomy Tower.

LXVIII

ON A PICTURE OF CHATTERTON IN HIS ATTIC.

(Presented to me by my friend, Dr. C. D. Scott.)

Thus is he pictured here: in boyhood's bloom,
In his loved attic, o'er a table bent,
Deeply absorbed in some old document;
While through a dingy casement of the room,
Soft sunlight falling, half dispels the gloom.
The ill-starr'd bard upon his dreams intent!
In his youth's flower, when pure and innocent,
As yet he reck'd not of his day of doom.
Would that his name recalled no scene less sweet;
For we would fain enshrine him evermore
In memory thus,—the sunshine on his head.
But ah, that garret in the London street,
Where 'mid torn parchments strewn about the floor,
Upon his couch, the Marvelous Boy lay dead!

LXIX

POETS' CORNER: WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

Whoe'er he was his name we should revere,
The man who first by happy chance bestowed
The appellation on this last abode
Of these the bards, whose tombs are builded here.
The "Poets' Corner"! It suggests the cheer
Of cozy hearth, or nook by shady road,
Fit spots wherein to pore o'er lay and ode,
And think on poets whom the heart holds dear.
Here, where the sculptor to the singer pays
Tributes of marble that enchant the eye,
How sweet to pause, and ponder, deep and long;
On Chaucer's and on Spenser's tombs to gaze;
To mark where Tennyson and Browning lie,
And many more of England's Kings of Song.

LXX

AN ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT.

Written on vellum, with elaborate skill,
Before the Conquest, by a monk, they say,
It looks as fresh as though 'twere yesterday
He touched it last, and laid aside his quill.
Ten centuries since have wrought it little ill;
Strange how the volume hath withstood decay,
Even as the Word, which Time eats not away,
Nor moth corrupts, remains unshaken still.
The colored pictures, edged with ivy-slips,
Some stained-glass window's sumptuous panes recall;
Three angels here, with trumpets at their lips,
Symbol the joy in Heaven o'er Babylon's fall;
On this, the beast of the Apocalypse;
And, on that page, the shipwreck of St. Paul.

LXXI

"WHEN I LOOK BACK UPON THOSE HAPPY YEARS."

When I look back upon those happy years,
When we were young and newly wed, sweet wife,
(Who now hast entered on eternal life),
How can my eyes but weep thus bitter tears?
The awful thought of thy departure sears
All joy within me. Oh, the pain and strife,
The agony wherewith my soul is rife,
Since thou art gone with all that life endears.
Like Jesse's son, I shun my wonted ways,
And touched by the deep pathos of my loss,
Brood, with vain longings, on departed days;
Or bowed in anguish 'neath my heavy cross,
Into the future, unaspiring, gaze,
Counting the remnant of my hopes as dross.

LXXII

"MAKE ME SOME SIGN FROM OUT THE AWFUL GLOOM."

Make me some sign from out the awful gloom,
We know not of, O dear, departed shade;
How fares it with thee where thy feet have strayed,
We know not whither, but beyond the tomb?
Tell me that light doth still thy path illume;
That not in darkness thou dost grope afraid;
That Heaven's pure joys, for which we oft have prayed,
Around thee now in full perfection bloom.
I ask thee not death's secrets to impart,
Or lift the veil, or point the unknown road,
Or of the soul's mysterious bourn to tell;
But, oh, to ease the sadness of my heart,
Make me, Sweet Spirit, from thy dim abode,
Only some sign that all with thee is well.

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